DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 139 260 FL 008 563

AUTHOR	Leong, Charles L.
TITLE	The Eagle and the Dragon. A Real-Life Chinese-American Story.
INSTITUTION	San Francisco Unified School District, Calif. Chinese Bilingual Pilot Program.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	76
NOTE	78p.; For related documents, see FL 008 561-567
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$4.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Asian Americans; *Biculturalism; *Bilingual Education; *Chinese Americans; *Chinese Culture; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Education; Elementary Secondary Education; Instructional Materials; Learning Activities; *Reading Materials; Social Studies
IDENTIFIERS	Elementary Secondary Education Act Title VII; ESEA Title VII

ABSTRACT

This volume originated with a desire to supplement the social science curriculum in grades 4 through 8 of the Chinese Bilingual Pilot Program. The volume thus consists of ten chapters, or stories, reflecting the life experiences of one Chinese American which may be used to stimulate discussion and study around the topic of the heritage of Chinese Americans in the United States. Each chapter is followed by discussion topics and learning activities. (AM)

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The Eagle and the Dragon

A Real-Life Chinese-American Story

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By Charles L. Leong

Illustrations by Wayne Chin

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By Charles L. Leong

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Chinese Bilingual Pilot Program
San Francisco Unified School District

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About This Publication

The author, Charles Leong, was originally commissioned to write ten stories about the experiences and history of the Chinese Americans. The stories were to be used to supplement the social science curriculum in the Chinese Bilingual Pilot Program in grades 4-8. It was decided that the materials developed should be authentic to the experiences of Chinese Americans. After many discussions with the author, the project staff decided that one approach to the task was to tap the experiences of the author's own life which spans over a half a century. Hence, Charles Leong was commissioned to write an autobiography.

The autobiography may be used as a starting point for class discussions and for further study into the heritage of Chinese Americans in the United States. Learning activities and topics for discussion are listed at the end of each chapter. Consideration should be given to the fact that the autobiography is the story about one man's life experiences. Even though other Chinese Americans may have shared similar experiences, they should not be construed as typical or representative of all Chinese Americans in the United States.

It is my hope that other publications that become available will provide information and insight into the history and experiences of Americans of all ethnic backgrounds in the United States.

Roger Tom, Project Manager
Chinese Bilingual Pilot Program
April 1976

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INTRODUCTION

This is a real life story. The true story of an American of Chinese ancestry which spans half a century. This is a story which this man had wanted to tell his two sons one day. The life of every person perhaps is pretty much the same and yet, different.

This is the same the world over. Here in America, the Chinese-American experience does have its differences in details, in the ways of life. How many fathers do tell of the Chinese-American experience to their children? We really don't know. We do know that the first half of this century the average Chinese parent in the United States of America had neither time nor energy to bottle the flow of memories - whether bitter or sweet - because of the struggle for survival.

I'm sure they would have liked to. Memories and experiences are like echoes in the canyon of life to be heardand remembered for the next generation.

This is not a Chinatown ghetto story. Here simply is the story of one man's experiences as a Chinese-American. We have chosen to tell just one man's story because in the course of half a century it is easier to follow just one road of history, with its fast freeways, its narrow mountain paths, its off-ramp wanderings into busy streets or lonely lanes. To follow one man's journey will have incidents and scenes different from other Chinese-Americans. But we think the broad pattern will be the same, for the human experience is fundamental. The author of this story will play the role of narrator to make the road easy to follow.

This story will cover five decades of some of the most exciting and important changes in both world and American history, and therefore the lives of the Chinese-Americans all over the U.S.A. This period of time spans the years when the horse cart was being replaced by the automobile to the great achievement of man being hurled through space to walk on the moon. It covers two great World Wars and many bloody lesser ones. There were many major achievements and disappointments for mankind but with still a continuing hope for eternal peace and the dignity of man.

This was a good and challenging time for anyone in which to live and grow, for a Chinese-American to test, and be tested for surviving and contributing as a worthy citizen of this world.

Charles L. Leong

Sorting Apples, Watsonville, 1924

Chapter 1

Boyhood On A Farm

I grew up on a farm. At that time I didn't know that most Chinese-American children were born and raised in big cities which had "Chinatown" - places like San Francisco, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Boston or Seattle.

The farm was located about a hundred miles from San Francisco, near a sleepy little town named Watsonville, famous for its apple, lettuce and strawberry crops.

My father was an itinerant farm worker. He worked in the potato farms, grape crops and the salmon canneries in Seattle. His life was typical of thousands of Chinese, Japanese and Filipinos in the 1920's, 1930's, and 40's. So my mother and I stayed with an uncle on what I always called and remembered as a "farm" although really it was just two acres or so of ground. On it was located a building for drying apples, and a bunkhouse, which is a place to sleep, for the 40-50 men workers. My uncle operated this "dryer", which is what we called it. As I remember it, the buildings were set back of a dirt lane leading from a public road. The land was planted with corn and Chinese garden vegetables, which meant there always was plenty for me to do since I had no brothers or sisters to help.

The time was after the first Great World War of 1918 when America became a world power. Life was busy. America was busy, pushing into a new era of mobility with the Model T FORD and the auto age.

Still there were lots of horses and buggies, and wagon-loads of boxed apples came to our dryer drawn by teams of horses. During the apple season, the first thing I did after grammar school was to scramble like an unwanted little devil to the first wagon load of fruit which arrived, to pick the freshest, largest apple to bite into.

Apple-drying season, from August through December, was the busiest time of the year for me. There were extra tasks. Regularly every morning it was my job to feed the pigs and chickens before walking to the Pajaro grammar school. I knew at the time that farm boys all over rural America did the same thing. Many years later when I was a soldier I saw the same thing in villages in China.

Right after school, during the apple season, I earned money by making boxes in which were packed the dried fruits. When I first started I was too short, so I stood on a platform. Another job was to stencil the packed boxes with a thick black ink for addresses with far away place names like London, England; Oslo, Norway and Berlin, Germany. A few times I slipped my name and address into the boxes but I never heard from anyone in that part of the world.

My nearest neighbors of my same age, and going to school with me were Dorothy, a bright blonde girl and her brother John. Their parents ran a gasoline service station nearby. It was a new kind of business then. Across the road lived a Mexican-American girl named Eleanor Cano. Her father was the peace officer, or constable for the little Pajaro area.

In those days a person couldn't just click a button and have electrical machines do all kinds of things, such as washing clothes. We didn't even have

gas stoves, for cooking for a whole crew of workers in the dryer. Part of their pay was food and lodging. Sometimes I had to help chop wood, or clean out the ashes from the brick stoves. But even at the dryer plant my friends and I had fun. The giant size ovens for drying the sliced apples were fed by crude oil. As one peeked through the air holes, the orange heat was like a volcano bottled up.

With a flat wooden stick we would place plump potatoes on the brick facing, and in ten minutes we had marvelous dry-baked potatoes, flaky and pure.

The Pajaro River was only less than a mile from our farm, and in early spring sometimes it overflowed and flooded the business buildings and the lower part of main street across the bridge in Watsonville. The river banks were thick always with willow trees. This was our source for many carefully picked branches for bows and arrows. It was an age of innocence. We had everything, including a "Sherwood Forest" in which to play Robin Hood.

Some Chinese kids lived in the small "Chinatown" area in Pajaro across the bridge from Watsonville. We all went to the same little grammar school and played together although my daily tasks on the farm were different. When the river flowed smoothly after the spring torrents, we went fish netting, and swimming with all the neighbors and friends.

At the river and swimming hole, with sun, flashing water and innocent laughter we were not white, yellow, or brown races. We were all children, growing up in a paradise of American small town and farm life.

CHAPTER ONE
Discussion Topics & Learning Activities

CONCEPT: "Chinese American Communities"

A. For Class Discussion

1. What kinds of things make up a community?

2. What are some reasons why people live where they do?

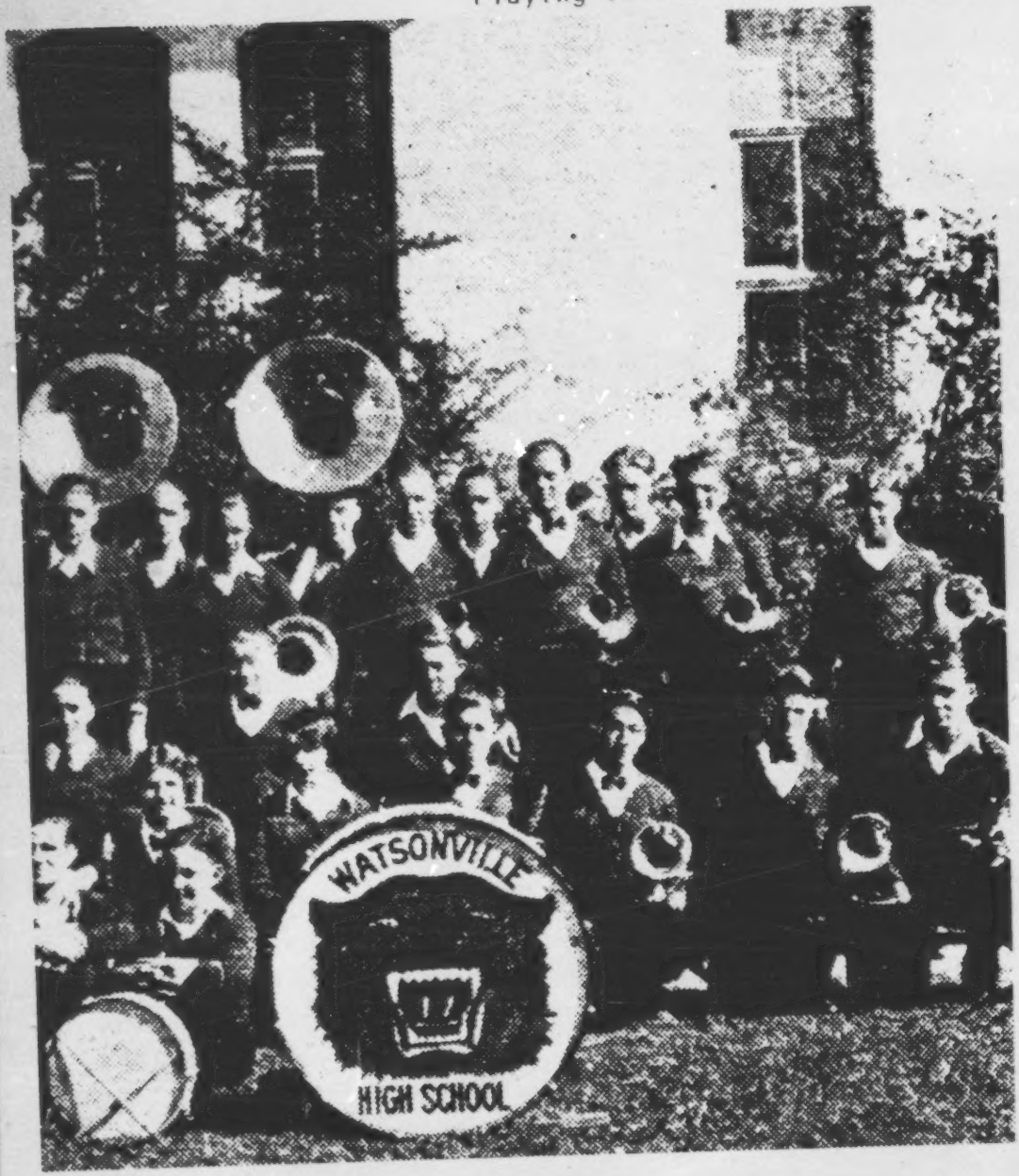
3. What are some reasons why people move from one place to another?

B. Learning Activities

1. On a California map, mark the areas where Chinese communities are located.

2. For each Chinese community located describe the kind of community it is and some reasons why the Chinese first moved there.

Playing in the School Band, 1930



Chapter 2

High School -- Another World

In the 1920's and 30's going to high school usually was the final step before settling down in life as useful citizens of the community. Not too many went on to college. In those days we went through eight straight years of grammar school right into high school without going to junior high.

I am sure that for all of us starting high school was a solemn, but exciting experience of entering the gates of a new world. This was especially true for me, a Chinese-American. I knew that across the Pajaro River, the town of Watsonville was the center of our small world known as the Pajaro Valley. The "union" high school was located here. Of course all of my graduating classmates from grammar school were going to the same high school. But there were students from other districts too. To me, it was a big new world of mostly white Americans.

I already knew that, of course, in my occasional trips to "town" in Watsonville. The big stores had names like Freirmuth Hardware, Ford's Department Store, Krough Drug Store, Leask Gift Shop. How different from San Francisco Chinatown where I now live and every store sign leaps with Chinese names only.

High school was a new world. It had so many new activities, things not done in a small country grammar school. Activities were spread out like wares at a street fair, waiting for one to match, and pick and choose. For some crazy reason, which

now I can't remember, I chose to try out for the high school band. I chose to learn how to play the trombone. Maybe it was because they had an extra one to loan me. I do remember my mother being completely baffled, and surprised that I would do a thing like that. She asked: "Is it going to take extra time to play?" "Yes, mother, but I promise to do my regular jobs I'm supposed to do."

Trying new things and being curious. That is part of growing up. I had seen and heard the high school band, and others, in the big annual Fourth of July parade. At first the excitement of being a part of this razzle-dazzle appealed to me. Later it came to me slowly, the hard work and practice which produced beautiful melodic music. Also, the teamwork of forty musicians, each playing his or her art, which blends into an inspiring symphony or stirring march. Our hard work and teamwork was rewarded one year when we won the State of California marching band championship!

Perhaps part of my seeking hard for activities in high school sprung from the fact of being an only child. Also, my father died when I was twelve. We all need being with, and working with other people.

A more solitary hobby, which is enjoyable to me even today, was taking art classes. Miss Waite, a gray-haired little woman was the art teacher, who almost scared me by saying:

"You're very talented in art. You should plan to go to New York and attend the Art Students' League."

To me at the time, it was like telling me to fly to Mars. I never enrolled at the New York art school, but I did continue enough to be art editor of the high school year book.

In high school, still another activity I joined baffled, and maybe even made my mother angry at me.

I tried out for the track team and made the team. Then I proudly announced the fact to my mother. She snapped at me: "Are you going to get money for it?"

I was stunned, because the average American parents would have been proud. But to the average Chinese family of that period, such use of time was frivolous when everyone had to work hard.

Many times as I looked back, I never regretted joining these activities, not only for the personal fun and achievement. One very subtle factor was at work all this time: I learned -- whether I knew it or not -- that joining the majority "white" world in many activities put me in situations where I either competed against, or work with, other individuals almost daily. This was integration the easy way.

This is very true because in the band I had my first experience in having my Chinese ancestry noted -- but, in a positive, complimentary way.

We were practicing for the state band contest. In one section of a piece called "Light Calvary" there were several bars written for a trombone solo. I had the part. In a final session, I played it well.

"Hey, you did it great China Boy!"

It was the band master and leader, Mr. Carolyn. He smiled and the whole business delayed the next bars of playing. After that I was "China Boy" in the band. Why? I was the first Chinese to have played in the high school band.

This feeling of ease with the majority white world first was developed in high school. It has helped me throughout my life.

However, participating in all these high school things -- sports, music, art -- would not have been possible without the understanding and help of one person. In everyone's life usually some persons play "fate", or have some influence.

In my case it was a genial, kind man named Martin E. Johnson.

One day in my freshman year in high school, I noticed an unfinished store front being painted with the sign JOHNSON DRUG STORE over it. The apple dryer season was over. I felt that I needed more money. The drug store, ready to be opened, was located in the lower part of Watsonville, near the Pajaro River and where the Chinese, Japanese and lower priced stores were located. The back part of many of these stores had gambling, like in Reno, for the pleasure of farm workers.

I walked in, asked for the owner and Mr. Johnson heard out my idea, which was that since I was a Chinese boy, the merchants in the area knew me. Also, I would be useful both as a delivery boy and and janitor after school. Fortunately for me, the idea made sense to him. He said: "Come in tomorrow

after school and you can start work."

These few words changed my life. First of all, Mr. Johnson allowed me to take time -- to be worked out -- on track meets, on band appearances. He treated me as an equal, not as a lower class Chinese worker. He let me study at the drug store when it was quiet. Best of all, he had a large magazine stand, and I was allowed to look at any magazine. Many of these magazines, to a young Chinese-American boy in a small town, was a magic carpet to a different world. And the pay was thirty dollars a month.

Besides the mass magazines of the time like Collier's, Liberty and Saturday Evening Post, I was able to pour over international questions in the Atlantic, and know the elegant world of the witty, talented, rich or educated in the short stories, poems, articles and beautiful advertising in The New Yorker magazine.

Very early it all gave me an idea of what the world was like outside of Watsonville.

CHAPTER TWO
Discussion Topics & Learning Activities

CONCEPT: "Being Different"

A. For Class Discussion

1. What were some of the things that the author did that his mother did not like? Why didn't she like them? Why did the author do them?

2. If you felt that it was important to do something and your parents did not like it, what are some of the things you would do?

B. Learning Activities

1. Make a list of things which you and your parents (or your best friend) may not agree on and give some reasons why you may disagree?

2. Describe what you may have to do when you do something which other people do not like.

Watsonville City Park, 1930

Chapter 3

Farewell To Watsonville

Through the years since high school, I have gone back to Watsonville occasionally. After graduation I lived in town. At this time we operated on a contract basis another apple dryer, owned by a Mr. Steve Scurich, a wealthy Slav. Watsonville was a Yugoslav center, and many of the big farms and apple orchards were owned by names such as Scurich, Capotanich, Franich and Resetar.

I stayed for a couple of years, uncertain of my direction and my future. There were half a dozen Chinese-American boys of my age, living and working around the little "Chinatown" area in Pajaro, or the lower end of Watsonville -- Earl Goon, Walter Shew, Parker Chan, Elmer Shew, Harry Quock, Eddie Dong. They had sisters. By now there were maybe twenty Chinese families in the area. Of the three Chinese graduates in my class only one went straight to the university. She was Emma Dong, a brilliant straight A student whose two older brothers were already physician and pharmacist.

In the beginning of the 1930's this town had enough Chinese young people, who, through the Methodist church, enjoyed little "socials" and dances. I still played my trombone, and had learned to play the drums. With a couple of older fellows who had moved into town and played saxophone and clarinet, we formed "Charlie's Haywire Orchestra". We played for these socials, as well as going to the neigh-

boring towns of Monterey and Salinas where there lived other Chinese young people.

At this time, although I moved freely in many circles of this small town, I found that outside of school functions, "social" life was confined to Chinese friends. For me, it's hard to believe now, because our personal friends and social life are of many faces. But in those times I think we ourselves thought of being more "Chinese" than "American". Two Chinese boys played on the high school varsity basketball team, and we had just enough players, big and small, to form a team which won the local YMCA championship. The Chinese older folks knew about it and showed a certain pride because it was written in the local daily paper. Perhaps this was the first clue of racial identity and pride, although I felt that my mother was glad to see me working for a white boss. At the time, I was the only Chinese kid working for one. After high school she wanted me to really learn the apple drying business. My uncle thought that I could help him in a small coffee shop, located in a gambling hall, after the apple season.

I ran the apple plant for a season, and continued to work for Mr. Johnson. For the first time, on a personal responsible basis, I dealt as an adult with persons of all races: Mr. Scurich, the Slav plant owner; Chinese and Filipino workers; Japanese and white American apple growers. There were no blacks, or Negroes, as they were then called, in Watsonville. In the business I learned about the different kinds of apples. And I find now, as then, that people and races -- like apples may be tart, sweet, green-skinned or bright red -- but really, in spite of the differences, pretty much the same.

After the apples I cut lettuce in the fields. It was really hard work. I packed lettuce in an icy plant for shipping to other parts of the country and continued to work for Mr. Johnson in the evenings. I decided that remaining in Watsonville had nothing for me. Yet, it took lots of money to go to college. I had to start climbing the path to somewhere, and it meant further schooling. Elmer Harris, a friend who played in the high school band with me, and I went to Salinas Junior College just in the mornings for a year. We both came back after lunch to work. He picked me up and drove 25 miles to nearby Salinas.

What to prepare for? Dentist? Lawyer? Engineer? I was not strong in math and science in high school, but starting college was a beginning. In those days, just by checking I knew that the Chinese who passed the professional courses like law, medicine or dentistry practiced within the Chinese community only. Many, many other professions, including even teaching, were discouraged for Chinese. Today, there are nearly 2,000 Chinese teaching in American universities and colleges alone! And think of the hundreds teaching high schools and grade schools in California.

Then, as now, choosing a meaningful life-work always is a hard decision for a young person. The difference being, in my day, a majority of college-trained occupations were hard for Chinese-Americans, or any minority, to get into.

Like a slow-moving cloud, the Great Depression which started in the east coast and New York City drifted west, and finally its black shadow covered California in the 1930's. Jobs were scarce. Leaving the security of a small town, where by now everyone knew me, was a hard decision to make.

Mr. Johnson, my drugstore boss and friend, remained a real pillar of strength when I decided to at least go full time to the college closest to home where I could come home every week to see my mother. I entered San Jose State College, only fifty miles away and Mr. Johnson told me I could work for him every week-end, doing everything including dressing the windows and waiting on customers. I either hitch-hiked or picked a ride with one of the fellows from the home town.

I knew that many people, including my mother and uncle, very silently thought I was foolish to leave the quiet little town set in a beautiful valley, but it had to be farewell to Watsonville.

CHAPTER THREE
Discussion Topics & Learning Activities

CONCEPT: "Exploring Feelings"

A. For Class Discussion

1. How does it feel to have to move to a new place to live?

2. Why do you think it feels the way it does?

B. Learning Activities

1. Find a person you know who had to move to a new country to live. List his reasons for moving.

2. List the person's feelings on moving to another country.

College Daily Newspaper Editor, 1937

Chapter 4

Printer's Ink In My Blood

At home most of the time I ate Chinese food, even for breakfast. I was advised by the school that as a new student at San Jose State College, the simplest solution to board and room was to join a family boarding house. I checked with a Hanlon family, paid them $45 a month for breakfast, dinner and room and for the first time in my life lived with white Americans. I remember it was either stewed prunes or apricots, and hot oatmeal every morning for breakfast. Strangely, I still like it today.

Daily oatmeal was not the only new thing for me in college.

One of the new things was the fact that at college students came from different cities, states, and even countries. There was a great deal of freedom of choice in subjects and classes. Enrolling at San Jose, I was still uncertain about a definite choice of "career", and took general courses. An English class, of course, was a required course and sometime during the first semester I wrote an article about the science department, which seemed to be a pretty dull place to many people. The teacher thought it was different enough so that perhaps the college daily paper might like to publish it.

I had done well in writing at Salinas Junior College, so I took a chance and brought it to an editor of the paper. It was printed with my name credited on it.

I was even more surprised when the editor of the paper asked if I would like to be a reporter for the college daily. It was an "activity" with no credit, although if I liked it I could take a course in news reporting and get class credit. I had no real idea of going into newspaper work. Never heardof any Chinese being in it in those days.

The depression was in full force. Millions of persons all over the country were out of work. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had a public work program which included the colleges. It was called the National Youth Administration or NYA for short. By now, being a poor student, I was working in it, being assigned to help the English department as a teacher's aide. All this, fortunately, built up my background in the English language, and I was being paid for it. I gradually learned to appreciate the differences in usage of words. Just as in an ice cream cone there is a difference, however slight, between a plain chocolate and an almost chocolate flavor.

All this time I wrote more and more, for the school paper and in English writing classes. One of the satisfactions of the college paper was seeing one's own writing being published, sometimes with one's own name printed right on top. It was a reward for good work. I also entered the annual college prizes for essays and poems, and won a few small prizes. I took more professional training courses in journalism, and gradually wrote a column in the college paper, the Spartan Daily. And I became a news editor, which meant I assigned and picked the news to be used from many reporters. Then I moved up to be a feature editor. I worked

in the print shop and learned how the printers set type and printed the daily paper. A daily paper is one of the most complicated things to produce, and San Jose State was one of a handful of colleges on the west coast to have a daily. I learned a lot very fast.

When I became a news editor, it meant being a kind of a "boss" to a crew of workers. I had to give orders daily. Already around the small college campus of 3,000 students I was fairly well known, partly because of my column and partly because I was the only Chinese on the paper, and therefore easy to identify. And, many students and professors seemed to like my column.

But praise is part of a two-edged sword. The other side is prejudice, coming from praise. So sometimes I knew that of the reporters, both men and women students -- but all white Americans -- taking "orders" from the Chinese-looking boss was something new to them. When a thing is new, it sometimes is not understood. A situation not understood can create resentment. And prejudice, then.

This was my first lesson in leadership for a Chinese-American, in the totally white world of the Spartan Daily.

In my junior year, I was managing editor of the paper, and other half-formed ideas of going in to dentistry, or law faded fast. Printer's ink was in my blood. Editorial ideals were in my heart. And writer's cramp was in my hands. I was scared about the whole idea, but I decided to be a newspaperman. I was even afraid to tell my mother. She knew I was in college, working hard, and reasonably keeping out of mischief. I was scared because I

didn't know of any other Chinese-American going into such a profession, but I liked it. Later I found out about a real pioneer, a brilliant woman reporter named Mamie Louise Leung in Los Angeles. It encouraged me. Then I was told that Dr. Wellington Koo, the world famous Chinese diplomat was editor of the daily paper while a student at Columbia University. I didn't even dream of comparing him, a Chinese aristocrat with me, a son of a peasant knowing little Chinese and learning English the hard way. Mamie Louise Leung really was the example for me to follow because she too was a Chinese-American.

Another incident, which I remember clearly as if it happened yesterday, was receiving a short letter, along with a check for one hundred dollars, signed by an Elsie Weil, assistant to the famous novelist Pearl Buck, famous for her "Good Earth" novel on China. I had written an essay for a college competition telling about how Chinese mothers are misunderstood because being hard-working, the mothers did not pick up American ways fast enough for the children. I was describing a real life experience, because I knew I had been ashamed of my mother simply because she couldn't speak English. Well, I couldn't speak Chinese well either, but she wasn't ashamed of me.

The essay was accepted by ASIA magazine, then a world-famous publication. I must confess it was, and still, is one of the biggest thrills of my life. Pearl Buck was editor of ASIA. I think that short letter and check definitely gave me the final encouragement to take up newspaper writing as a career. But reporters never get rich. The enrichment comes from the chance to explore people and the world around them, and write about it, and at least get paid some-

thing. The highest reward, whether you are a butcher, banker, or baseball player, is working hard and enjoying your work.

I would get a college degree in journalism, work on a newspaper, and maybe later teach English.

CHAPTER FOUR
Discussion Topics & Learning Activities

CONCEPT: "Feelings"

A. For Class Discussion

1. What might be some reasons why children feel ashamed of their parents because they do not speak English? How do you feel about this?

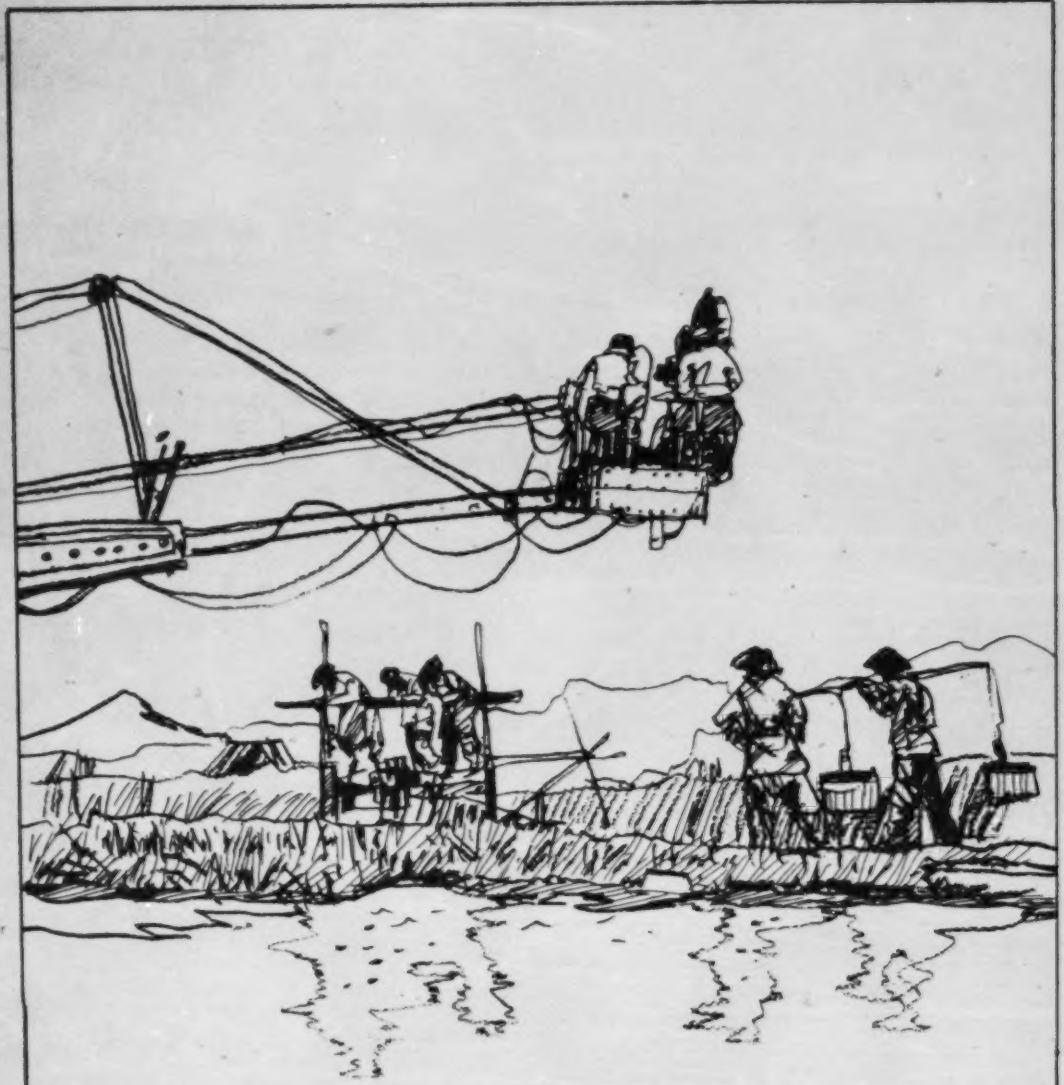
2. What might be your feelings if you had to take directions from someone who is different (culturally, racially, etc.) from you? Why?

B. Learning Activities

1. Make a list of feelings you have about your parents and try to discover why you feel the way you do.

2. Make a list of things about people that causes you to resent them and try to discover why you feel the way you do.

"Good Earth" Movie Set, 1936



Chapter 5

A Chinese Puzzle

My family and I have been living in San Francisco Chinatown, the biggest in the U. S. A. for the past quarter century, surrounded by Chinese faces, friends, food, language, stores, newspapers and restaurants. Looking back now, it seems unbelievable that from high school almost through college, I wanted to "run away" from my Chinese heritage and culture.

First of all, I knew very little about the vast historical background of my Chinese heritage. I remembered for a while going to a Chinese class, conducted by a church group, during my grammar school days in Pajaro. None of us learned much. What you don't know you can't be proud of. Most of all, I observed that in those days, compared to now, America was strictly a white man's world. The term "civil rights" was not coined. An American awareness of other cultures only meant eating in a Chinese chop suey house, or spaghetti in an Italian restaurant. To join the march of personal progress, one had to march the American step every day in every way.

This was the tempo of America in the mid-thirties, awakening as a world power, and yet conservative because of the uncertainties of a major depression. I know now that a majority of the older Chinese here felt they were Chinese living in America. Many of us of college age felt that to be

Americans of Chinese ancestry -- well, we had to talk and act like Americans, even if we didn't look it. After 1911, when China changed from a decadent empire to a young republic, many Chinese-American college graduates of the 1920's and 1930's went back to the motherland to contribute their training. Also, many wealthy families sent their children back to schools like Lingnam and Pui Ching in Canton to teach them in Chinese background and language.

I had none of these objectives, having neither the money nor motives. My main goal simply was how to fit into an American society. Caught in the dilemna of being Chinese or American, or such a thing as Chinese-American, it was a hard, lonely road.

After my junior year at San Jose State when my goal of being a newspaperman seemed close, things changed abruptly. I went to Los Angeles for a short vacation, and there some friends jokingly said, "How would you like to act in the movies?" It seemed like fun, and although it turned out that really I didn't "act", I stayed and worked in the movie studios for a whole year.

On campus, I had completely erased things "Chinese" from my mind. In those days, groups like Chinese and Japanese clubs, composed of students of these nationalities, existed on every campus. It was a social safety valve, I think. I never felt the need to join.

In the movies, in one big scene change I became a young Chinese peasant, in a village in China! For a whole year then, I literally lived more authentically Chinese than I had ever dreamed of. You see,

in 1936 after Pearl Buck's great novel "Good Earth" about Chinese peasant life became world famous, it was set for a motion picture production. A whole village was built in replica. Farms and rice paddies actually were cultivated. A consultant on Chinese life and customs was hired direct from China to oversee that everything was authentic.

To show a whole village and its daily life, a cast of hundreds was needed. The actors and "extras" like myself, had to be, of course, Chinese or Filipinos who looked Chinese. One of the main character actors in "Good Earth" was Ching Wah Lee, the art expert of San Francisco Chinatown who today leads many Chinatown tours for school children.

For many months I earned my pay, $7.50 per day and lunch, as a young peasant working the rice paddies, hauling water with a bamboo pole, fighting locust. I knew then that my father lived the same way in his village in Canton.

All Hollywood seemed to be on a "Chinese" cycle that year. Other studios produced big pictures such as "Lost Horizon" and "The General Died at Dawn" -- all with genuine Chinese settings. All three still can be caught occasionally on the TV late, late shows.

Indeed during this era the whole country seemed to be in the midst of a "Chinese" fad. For American women, mah jong took its place as a social game along with bridge. Dr. Lin Yutang wrote "My Country and My People" which was to be the first best selling non-fiction book about the Chinese published in America. His and Pearl Buck's "Good Earth" were required reading for everyone, including Chinese-Americans. Including me.

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Even the very first Chinese cook book written in America, Henry Low's "Eat At Home In Chinese" was published at this time! Anna May Wong was a Chinese movie actress as well known as other stars of the period.

All this general public awareness and recognition of things Chinese naturally brought about a pride in being Chinese. At this point, actually earning daily money playing a Hollywood role as a "young Chinese in China," and with the press and public circling us with stories about the Chinese, I couldn't escape being Chinese even if I wanted to.

But Hollywood, however precisely real in its details of Chinese life for the camera, still was a make-believe world. When the cameras were put away, it was finished. At this time, in the real world, both Europe and Asia were smoldering before the inferno erupted. Italy's strong man Mussolini invaded Ethiopia. Germany's dictator Hitler was bluffing and nibbling away countries all around Europe. In China, already for five years Japanese troops had marched across Manchuria and North China, and the shadow of bombers flitted over many Chinese cities.

I returned to the comparatively semi-real world of college.

CHAPTER FIVE
Discussion Topics & Learning Activities

CONCEPT: "Mass Media May Contribute to Stereotypes of People"

A. For Class Discussion

1. What types of roles do Chinese play on television programs and in movies?

2. In the mass media what do Chinese look like? What kinds of things do they do? What kind of English do they speak?

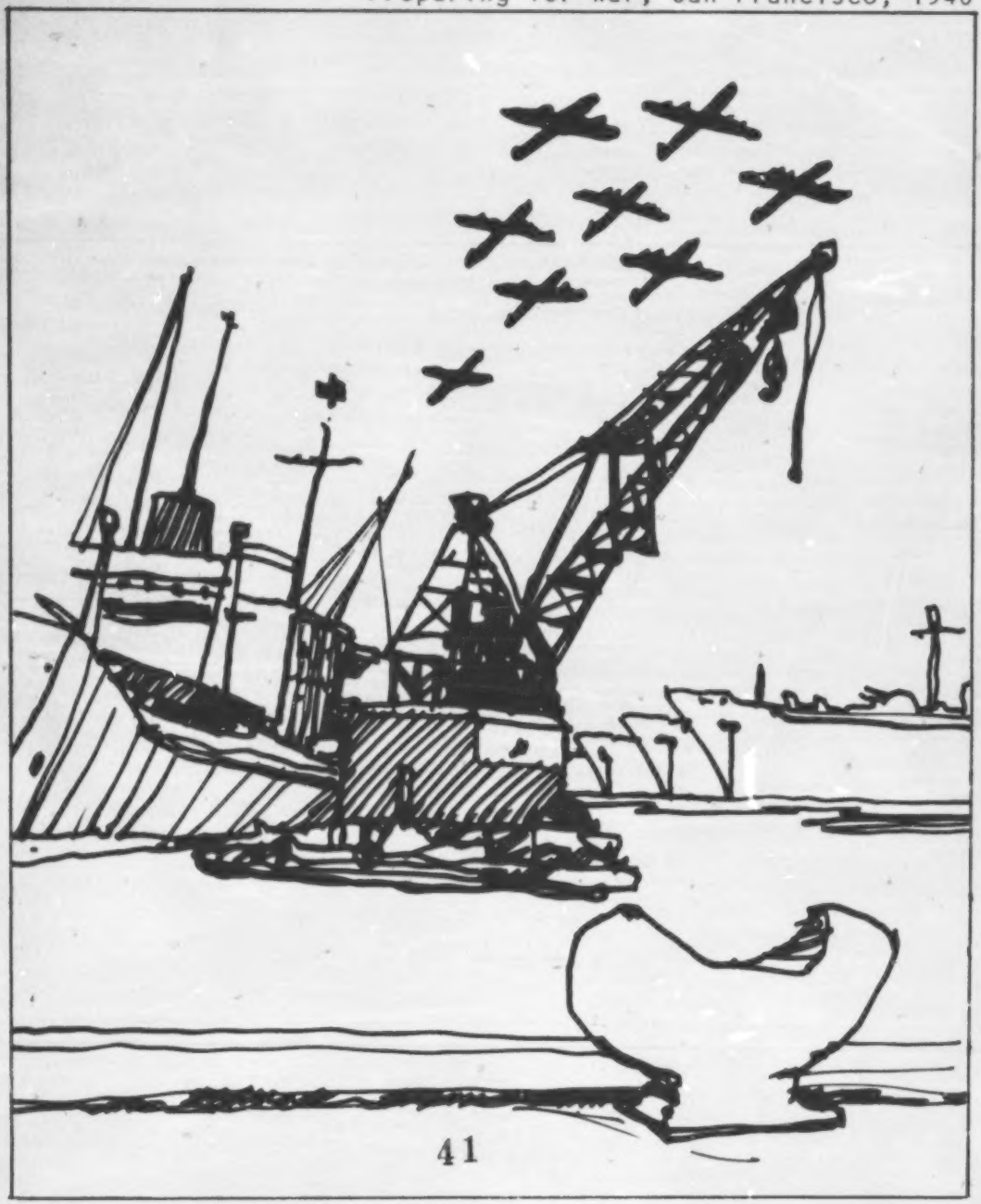
3. How are the Chinese you know different from the Chinese you see on television programs and in the movies?

B. Learning Activities

1. List the roles you would want to play if you were a Chinese American.

2. How are the roles you have selected different from the roles now seen of Chinese Americans in the mass media.

Preparing for War, San Francisco, 1940



Chapter 6

The Gathering Storm

When I returned to San Jose State College the world existed in an uneasy peace. Although for a whole year in Hollywood I lived only the make-believe role of a Chinese, the reality of a Chinese identity was never to be erased from me again.

Back on the campus I rapidly got into journalism again, and once more wrote a column and assumed the duties of a news editor. The campus newspaper Spartan Daily had a system of a staff election for the leadership position of editor-in-chief. Usually the managing editor had the favored spot. I was urged by some staff, especially those who knew me before I went to Hollywood, to try for the top job. I talked with Dr. Dwight Bentel, the department head, about the situation. He agreed, with some reservations that it was all right if the staff wished it. I decided to try.

In a grubby college newspaper office, I learned in a very personal way my first lesson on the power of a vote. On a newspaper staff of over thirty persons, a majority voted for me.

As a newspaperman, I would agree that the news services were correct in running a news story all over the country about "the first Chinese-American being elected editor of a college daily paper". Each year, several dozen colleges around the U. S. with daily papers elected editors. But my situation made the news all over the nation only because it was different because of the Chinese identity. Differences make the news.

History's tragedies also made headlines for China at this time. In 1937, Japan crippled Shanghai, China's largest city, and swept up the Yangtze valley, killing hundreds of thousands and leaving millions suffering as homeless refugees. San Francisco Chinatown, and Chinese all over America organized "Rice Bowl" parties to raise money to help their suffering brethren. The Chinese were in the news all the time.

Being editor-in-chief also taught me lessons in the political power held by decision makers, whether it be a parent (which we all know), a college editor, or the president of the United States. In my case, the student affairs were run by the student council, its president, and behind the scenes, the editor of the daily who was in a position of shaping up stories, or running editorials for or against an issue.

I'd like to think, even today, that in the student body affairs very few thought about the holder of editorial influence being Chinese. Nevertheless, the power of decisions was real, for that situation, and held by a Chinese-American and an otherwise all-white group.

After graduation from San Jose, I still felt the uncertainties and lack of confidence of being a Chinese-American in those times. I thought that, especially to enter teaching one day, I should have the extra weapon against possible racial barriers with a "prestige" school graduate degree.

I borrowed money and managed to enter Stanford University, still close to home so I could visit my mother, I had turned down a scholarship to Northwestern, near Chicago.

In the graduate school of journalism, which was very expensive, I was no longer a big campus figure. It was time to just learn academically, although I learned much in campus activities at San Jose. I studied, working two jobs -- washing dishes at a dormitory and selling games tickets -- and lived at the Chinese Clubhouse which housed about 20 students.

Here was another kind of experience. Many of the students were already well educated from Chinese universities, and from wealthy and established families. We Chinese-Americans came from parents who, being peasant stock, came to America to better themselves. But we all lived together and learned to get along because we were all Chinese.

At that time, although the Chinese clubhouse was located on "fraternity row", two streets of large handsome residential structures which had various fraternities or men's organizations, no Chinese belonged nor therefore lived in them. Chinese cooks, however, worked in many of them. Even at San Jose, where I was a "big man on the campus", I was invited to many white American home parties, voted into many honorary and service organizations, went to dances, but never was invited to join a white social fraternity. That was just a passing fly buzz on the surface of discrimination.

After I graduated from Stanford my apparently smooth, almost idealistic climb in the "wonderful world of learning how to be an American" stopped suddenly.

The clouds of war marred the heavens, and

America stepped up its preparedness program. All branches of the armed services increased their numbers of enlisted men and officers. The U. S. Navy, especially, had a drive for college graduates to be naval reserve officers, with direct commissions given qualified candidates. With two college degrees and good health, I thought I was qualified. In my innocence I knew nothing about the traditional racial barriers set up by the Navy at that time. I went to San Francisco to fill out the complicated forms required to apply for the naval commissions. I was allowed, of course, to fill out the forms. This was the first of several deep stabs into my spirit and belief in the equality of the American system at that time. Perhaps it was well that the stabs came quickly, fast and early.

I never heard from the Navy about whether I was qualified or not, in order to take the physical. I checked several times. The officers in charge claimed to know nothing. It was just polite avoidance of the act of discrimination. If this happened today, at least one would have legal help.

During the same period, I heard about a job opening as a reporter -- in my own home town of Watsonville! I was really excited. I applied. At this time, the morning paper which had the opening was sold to a newspaper chain directed out of Southern California. The local editor knew I was qualified. I knew the local situation. I thought I was an ideal candidate. But the editorial director, making decisions from four hundred miles away, wondered whether a "Chinese" reporter would fit into the system. More because I was rejected from my home town, where I first learned and tasted the sweet lessons of American democracy -- being turned down for my

first real newspaper job was an especially bitter emotional and spiritual pill to swallow.

A big city was the best escape route to forgetfulness. The closest big city was San Francisco. In the back of my mind I also knew it had the largest Chinatown. Maybe it was a comfort blanket. It also was the Pacific coast center of war preparation activities. The muscles of war were being flexed here.

CHAPTER SIX
Discussion Topics & Learning Activities

CONCEPT: "Racial Discrimination"

A. For Class Discussion

1. Have you ever been "picked on" because of your race or color? What happened? How did you feel?

2. What do you think are some of the reasons why people "pick on" other people because of their race or color?

B. Learning Activities

1. Find a friend or someone who is a minority person, and find out if they have ever been discriminated against. If he has been a victim of discrimination, find out what some of his feelings were.

2. List some of the ways people deal with racial discrimination.

William Hoy, Historian and Editor, 1941

Chapter 7

Chinatown Is My Home

San Francisco was stock piling for war even before the historic Sunday of December 7, 1941 when part of the American fleet was destroyed and Pearl Harbor in Hawaii was in flames from a surprise Japanese bomber attack.

Some young men in Chinatown joined the National Guard reserves. Men and women who used to be dish-washers in Chinatown restaurants went to work in the mushrooming shipyards to help build Liberty Ships. It was surprising to see a few grandmothers, who never ventured out of Chinatown before, jauntily wear the hard hats of shipbuilders.

By now, San Francisco was not new to me. Finally living in the Queen City of the West really was a high point in my changes from Pajaro to Watsonville, San Jose and Hollywood to The City. I had visited the city many times before. Chinese-Americans from all over Northern California came here for dances, for the climax of the Tahoe Christian Conference.

Also for very practical reasons, such as the routine of getting even a haircut. In those days, unlike now, white barbers treated Chinese coldly and uncomfortably. Living in Chinatown was an exciting new time for me. But even if I had wanted to, I couldn't live elsewhere. Today Chinese live all over San Francisco. At that time, landlords did not rent to Chinese beyond Mason Street, only three blocks from Grant Avenue.

My first job in journalism was doing publicity stories for the Democratic party headquarters, guided by a kindly woman director named Milla Logan who through the years as I knew her was one of the pioneers of race equality.

I met a Chinese-American named William Hoy, who certainly must be credited in history as the first to research and write about the Chinese in California. He thought that with my bit of practical journalism training and experience, we would make a good team to start a weekly paper in the English language for the Chinese people. Hoy had been an editor of a periodical called the Chinese Digest.

The goal was admirable. We were both writers, without much business experience. I even had more than he. The weekly tabloid paper was first called the California Chinese Press, and later the Chinese Press. It was a good paper, the first of its kind. It filled a need, but the population base was too small then. It was a hard challenge, long hours, and a tough business without profit. I also learned how to sell advertising, and later got a part-time job at the San Francisco Chronicle.

The Chronicle was professionally very satisfying, because the staff and fellow newsmen looked upon me as a good newsman, rather than Chinese. However, even here I did something extra -- I wrote a weekly column on Chinatown. I appreciated then, and continuing to now, the fact that if any racial minority person can perform the same job as his fellow American, the extra ethnic background is a help, not a hindrance.

Through being a part of the little Chinese Press, I found myself launched deeply into the San Francisco

Chinatown community without much advance preparation. My conversational Chinese was very limited. I kept my ears and eyes open, my mouth shut, and doggedly learned the hard way.

The Chinese Press lasted three years, but carved a journalistic niche in Chinatown. First William Hoy went into the army. Then I worked for United Press, being the first Chinese-American to be employed by them, while waiting to be called into service.

When the call came I was lucky enough to be assigned to the Air Force -- and eventually to China, although I didn't know it at the time. From then on, within a period of six months, I saw and traveled half way around the world.

Before this global adventure, I had one more disappointment with the U. S. Navy. Through the Chinese Press, I had helped the Navy recruit Chinese-Americans for enlistment as cooks and messmen. With their idea of gratitude, the recruiting officers told me if I joined the Navy, immediately I would be given the highest enlisted rating, that of Chief Petty officer, similar to master sergeant in the Army. It sounded great. I thought I would be yeoman or journalist, and maybe work into an opening as officer. When the time came to sign up, they coughed with some embarrassment, and lamely admitted that while I would be a Chief, I still had a steward insignia, subject to call to bring the captain his coffee. I politely declined, and entered the Air Force as a private.

CHAPTER SEVEN
Discussion Topics & Learning Activities

CONCEPT: "Value of Being Bilingual"

A. For Class Discussion

1. What are some of the reasons why some Chinese Americans do not speak Chinese?

2. What are some of the advantages of being able to speak two languages?

B. Learning Activities

1. Find a Chinese American who does not speak Chinese. Find out and list the reasons why the person does not speak Chinese.

2. Find a Chinese American who speaks Chinese and ask him to list any advantages of being able to speak two languages.

"Flying Tigers", China, 1944

Chapter 8

A "Flying Tiger" In China

In spite of my personal bitter experiences with the Navy, as I look back I think that the American armed forces were one of the great equalizers of race and status differences of civilian life. The fellow in the same rank and uniform is no better or worse than you, and outwardly looks like you.

My three years as a soldier in World War II began in the high mountain country at Denver, Colorado at an Air Force base called Buckley Field. After three months of basic training I was assigned for overseas duty, but not knowing where in the world I would go. A troop train carried me across the plains and seas of grain in Nebraska and Iowa to Chicago. For me, as for millions of other Americans in the Army, Navy and Marines, it was the first time we had traveled so far. From Chicago I went south to South Carolina for overseas training.

For the first time I saw with my own eyes what I had heard about: the direct, open race discrimination as practiced then against the black people (then called Negroes) in the southern United States. Of course by now I knew of the subtle race prejudice and lack of racial understanding in San Francisco and California. But here in the deep South it was an accepted practice, a way of life. Blacks had separate schools, spearate drinking fountains in public, separate theater entrances and restricted seating. The blacks gave way to whites on the streets. They sat

only in the back of buses. The blacks definitely were second class citizens, and color was the label. These things I witnessed personally. I must confess that at the time, knowing that my color was different too, I had mixed feelings of both fear, yet relief that not being black, I was not living in this prison without bars.

When the training for overseas duty was finished, we quickly prepared to sail toward a combat zone. We marched aboard a troop ship, the SS General Randall, carrying five thousand troops, packed like sardines in a can, for we really slept in bunks three tiers deep.

When we filed up the gangplank in full battle gear and equipment, a jaunty military band noisily covered up our silent goodbyes to America.

Steaming out of Norfolk, Virginia, we glided down past Cuba, on the first part of my forty-four days nautical adventure. The U. S. was fighting on several fronts. Its forces were spread in Europe, the Pacific and Asia. Many, many hundreds of Chinese-Americans like myself were undergoing the same experience. In the warm Caribbean Sea, approaching the complicated locks of the Panama Canal, I saw the thick green jungle growth for the first time in my life. Crossing Panama into the Pacific Ocean we headed toward New Zealand, zig-zagging occasionally to avoid possible enemy Japanese submarine hunters. New Zealand is located on the rim of the Antarctic and our ship ran into 80 mile an hour blizzards and ominous icebergs.

Shortly after this shuddering ice onslaught, we arrived in Perth, western Australia. After 30

days at sea, I wanted some Chinese food. Perth had a small Chinese colony and restaurants. I was a fellow Chinese, in American uniform. They would not let me pay. I was an honored guest -- their Chinese family spirit comforted me like the hot, delicious native food.

On our 44th day of sailing, and across the glass-like Indian Ocean, we landed in Bombay, one of India's great cities, facing the Arabian Sea. Coming from an Anglo-European civilization, India was my first confrontation with a people of another appearance, set of manners, and culture on a massive scale. For instance, seeing sacred cows wander at will all over the crowded streets.

After a rest period, our Air Force units were put aboard a native train with wooden benches for seats, and for four days we chugged across the flat Indian countryside, besieged by vendors, monkeys and beggars. Contrasted to the comfortable society of America, the gaunt Indian people were incredibly poor. Arriving in Calcutta, another large city, we had another rest period and went up north to the Assam tea plantation country in a steamer. Here at the airbase I knew for sure we were flying to China.

At this same base several squadrons, comprised mainly of Chinese-Americans, already had flown into China. They were the 407th and 555th Service Squadrons, and the 1157th Signal Squadron. These airmen were trained mainly for the unglamorous but vital jobs of maintenance, flight operations, and communications. My friend and editorial partner Bill Hoy was in the 407th.

On a late tropical afternoon, with a sunset dripping like an orange-red painting, we soared into the sky. Then the tropical night dropped like a black curtain.

Our night flight was over the dangerous Himalaya Mountains area known as "The Hump" and we landed in the high plateau of the Kunming Airbase, China. I had been excited, anticipating and even fearful, for the "Hump" flight was over some of the most dangerous terrain known. Directed to a camp area, I stumbled into bed, and began my first night's sleep on Chinese soil.

Early next morning I was awakened by a babble of strange tongues, tinkling bells -- which turned out to be ornaments for donkeys -- young and old hallooing to cattle. I poked my head out of the tent and saw a parade of Chinese peasants walking and working on the dirt road near our campsite, the farmhouses and rice paddies.

My memory immediately flashed back to my Hollywood days, and I said to the soldier who shared my tent: "Gosh, now I know we're really in China. This is just like a scene out of the movie "Good Earth".

The same morning after breakfast, I reported to the squadron assigned to me for my orders. I found myself ordered to duty in the headquarters of General Claire L. Chennault, the leader of the world famous 14th Air Force "Flying Tigers".

I became a Flying Tiger, too.

CHAPTER EIGHT
Discussion Topics & Learning Activities

CONCEPT: "Racial Discrimination Against the Blacks"

A. For Class Discussion

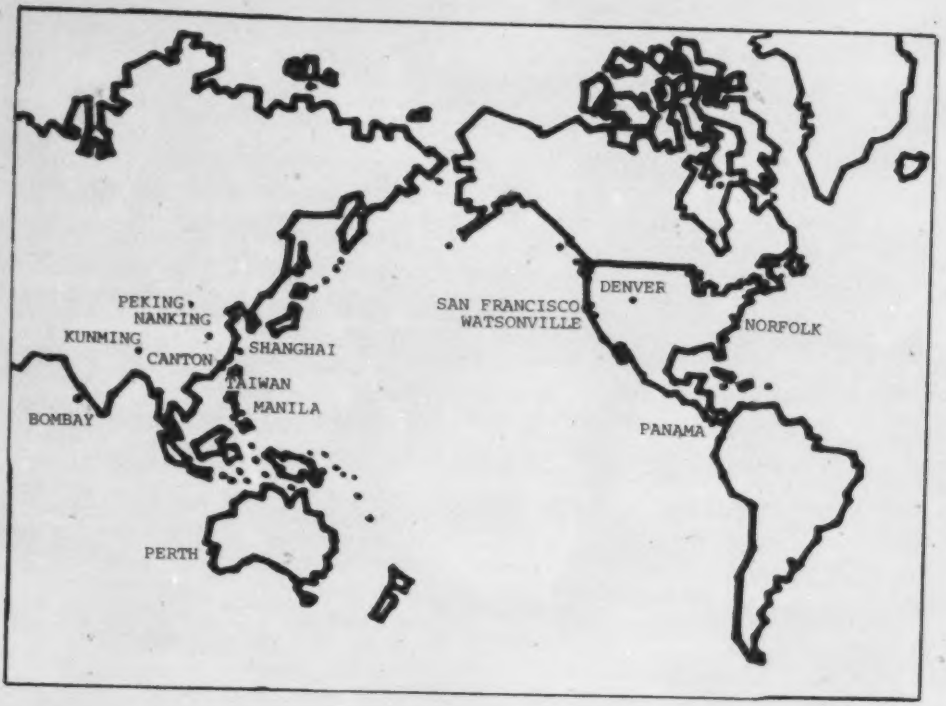
1. What are some of the things that might happen to you if you were a Black person living in the South?

2. What are some of the things people do to other people when they discriminate against them because of their race?

B. Learning Activities

1. Ask someone you know who has had experienced racial discrimination to tell you about what had happened to them.

2. List the experiences you have had when you had been discriminated against because of your race or color.


PEKING
NANKING
KUNMING
CANTON
SHANGHAI
TAIWAN
MANILA
BOMBAY
PERTH
SAN FRANCISCO
WATSONVILLE
DENVER
NORFOLK
PANAMA

Chapter 9

Adventure In The Middle Kingdom

A snappy salute to Major Tom Hutton, commanding officer of the information section, U. S. 14th Air Force Headquarters, China-Burma-India Theater of Operations, began my five years of adventure in the Middle Kingdom.

Kunming was the hub of all air operations in this phase of fighting the enemy Japan in World War II. It was the capital city of the province of Yunnan, which poetically means "South of the Clouds". During my first few months of duty in this ancient southwest China city, high on a plateau like Denver, Colorado, my head was in the clouds with the mixed excitement of final assignment to a permanent "fighting team" and the awe of actually living in China, the Middle Kingdom, the native land of my ancestors.

Although a soldier in uniform, and having been trained in some combat tactics, I really was not a front-line fighter, being neither an infantryman nor a flying combat crew member. As I learned my daily duties, I still was using my civilian skills of a newspaperman.

For almost two years, from private to private 1st class, to corporal to sergeant, I was recording for history the heroic acts of the already legendary 14th Air Force "Flying Tigers". In our section other enlisted men and officers -- writers, artists and photographers -- did the same things. We were

proud to be in personnel the smallest American Air Force, but one which statistically inflicted more damage to the enemy than any other. This was the tactic, this was the spirit with which General Chennault inspired his men. I was proud to be part of this team.

As in a newspaper office, I did many things. I wrote routine stories of airmen promotions. I interviewed flying aces. I did feature stories. I rotated with other writers on the daily official war communique (report), written after the early morning briefing about the previous day's fighting and results. They, like every story sent to the outside world, began: "A.P.O. (Army Post Office) 627, somewhere in West China ..." then the terse news describing whatever happened in the fighting fortunes of the 14th Air Force. The curtain of censorship prevented us from naming Kunming as our headquarters.

Since I was a headquarters man in Kunming, many times I was sent out to various Flying Tiger squadrons dotted in various parts of then Free China to help train their people to send in stories. I welcomed this chance to travel to all parts of west China, including Kweilin, where craggy mountains shrouded with mist looked like giant Chinese paintings come to life. Many times I flew to Chungking, then the wartime capital, located at the turbulent headwaters of the Yangtze river as well as other places assigned me. I also wrote features for an army weekly paper published in Calcutta, and the world-wide U. S. armed services magazine YANK. It was an exciting, satisfying life. Ironically, even here in China at the 14th Air Force headquarters I was the only Chinese-American on duty, so my living

Chinese-American race relations lessons continued. You learn to get along. Sometimes you make friends. In Kunming I kept telling a soldier from Indiana what a great place San Francisco was. This sergeant named Grant Robbins believed me. For the past twenty years we have done some business together and lunch occasionally, right here in San Francisco.

These two years in the daytime I performed my military duties. Off-duty at night and weekends, perhaps continuing the first lesson learned in the movie "Good Earth", I tried to explore the many layers of life and civilization of the Chinese people. It was matching up in real life many of the chapters described in Lin Yutang's "My Country and My People". It was listening to Mr. Chang, our office interpreter, tell about life in Shanghai from which he escaped. It was being invited to the wedding of Ah Bing, our barracks boy from Burma, or learning from him about the Chinese there, across the border from Yunnan. It was boating with a Chinese family in Kunming Lake and frying and eating fish caught right there. It was being invited to a banquet at the Governor's Palace and dining on many delicacies including an elephant's nose. It was knowing that here was the land where my people came from. This was the air they breathed. This was the land my father and his father cultivated. This was one of the longest continuous civilizations of this earth. It was strolling the streets of crowded Kunming and other places, and occasionally children -- as friendly and frank as children are the world over -- would smile, point at me, and laugh with good humor that "here is a Chinese who doesn't even know how to speak Chinese!" It was a squeamish feeling the first time I rode a ricksha, knowing I was being carried by another man's dignity and strength. It was spending hours in Chinese

antique shops examining priceless paintings and carvings. It was answering the questions from native Chinese about the life of a Chinese in America. It was the privilege of learning to live in a Chinese world.

In August, 1945, this started to come to an end when President Truman ordered the Atom Bomb to explode over Hiroshima, Japan. Fighting ceased. I shall never forget the ludicrous ending to the first official announcement I heard the night the fighting ended. After dinner I stayed in the dining hall to see a movie. In this Laurel and Hardy comedy as the pie landed on Laurel's face, the film stopped.

Over the public address system a colonel made this announcement: "Attention, men -- Now hear this, now hear this, President Truman has ordered the cessation of hostilities against Japan..."

There was an unbelieving silence of many seconds, and men quietly walked out of the dining hall. I still remember Laurel's surprised look with the cream pie on his face.

At this time I had been awarded a direct commission at headquarters, and from sergeant I became a 2nd lieutenant. Fighting stopped, though the war was not officially over. I had been assigned to a unit called the Chinese Combat Command, to assist the training of Chinese army troops. This task was ended. Many men with over two years of overseas duty were allowed to go home. Since I had accepted an officer's commission I was obligated to serve more time.

Hearing that an army newspaper was being set up in Shanghai, with the evacuation of the Japanese troops, I flew there to seek an assignment with "Stars and Stripes", the army daily paper.

For six months I performed my newspaper duties on "Stars and Stripes". I then was eligible to return to the U. S. A. But in Shanghai I continued my exploration of the Chinese people and country. For the first time I was closer to the centers of Chinese civilization, both ancient and modern. Fabulous cities like Peking, Hangchow, Soochow as described eight hundred years ago by Marco Polo, I was determined to see them, for who knew when I would have the chance to be in China again?

Vast China, like other countries suffering from the ravages of war and invasion, had millions of refugees to be returned to their native provinces. It had cities to be rebuilt, industrial plants to be replaced, hungry mouths to be fed, for planes and cannons do not grow crops. This challenging humanitarian task was assigned to UNRRA, an organization of the Allied Nations which fought in World War II. It was international in idea and workers, and its mission encompassed both Europe and Asia. UNRRA, whose full name of United Nations Rehabilitation and Relief Administration described its function, established its China Mission headquarters in Shanghai only a block away from the "Stars and Stripes" office.

I found an opening in the only kind of work I knew, that of reporting, and was accepted as a field correspondent to cover UNRRA activities all over China. Through this job I saw all the major cities of the nation, and wrote human interest

With a Refugee Boy in Taiwan, 1947

stories for the world press on the sufferings of the refugees, the diseases, the valiant efforts of the people to recover from the tragedies of war. Every time I see a TV coverage of refugees on the run -- anywhere in the world -- I am reminded of those months in China reporting the refugee stories. Sorrow and suffering know no national boundaries nor years.

From months of travel in the field I returned to Shanghai headquarters. The deputy director of the information office, an Australian newspaperman named Harold Timperley appointed me his executive assistant. In this office most of the staff -- both professional and clerical -- were Chinese nationals, and I gained an opportunity to learn office administration with a staff of sixty. Here I ran into a situation similar in a sense to being editor of the college daily. I was the only Chinese-American on the staff. Even though I was of Chinese ancestry, I sensed some resentment. Here I lived under a Chinese roof, but I was still a stranger at the gate.

After 18 months, Mr. Timperley resigned to take a position with the United Nations in Paris, and kindly recommended me to his post. I also went to Taiwan, where UNRRA helped especially the head-hunter tribes in the mountains. During this period, I went to South China and arranged to visit my native village. Toward the end of the second year, the UNRRA program was scheduled to end. I wrote to an uncle in the village of Cha Huoun, district of Sun Wui, telling him I would be visiting him. I had never been to my ancestral home.

I took a week's leave, and flew down to Hong Kong. From there I took a train to Canton, and then a river boat to Gong Moon city, thence by bicycle to Sun Wui city. Here at a shop my uncle had chosen, I waited for him to come by river in a sampan. I loaded the little sampan with my bags full of soap, money and some extra clothing to distribute to the villagers.

I didn't realize that three hours later, when the sampan reached the village, a royal welcome awaited me. Firecrackers crackled, gongs and drums beat, and there was a general holiday feeling. The village elders told me I was the very first overseas Chinese to return to the village since the end of the war. This settlement of several hundred persons were mostly of the Leong family surname.

The way the village looked did not surpise me because in my earlier travels throughout China I saw and went through scores of them. What surprised me was the sameness of people's experience. I saw one young man teaching the kids basketball. He was very eager to talk to me and ask me questions. His name was Ignacio. A strange name for an overseas Chinese. I then found out that he was sent back from Mexico and stayed in the village throughout the war. He felt the tie with me because he too was not a native, but an overseas Chinese -- in this case, Chinese-Mexican.

The third day of my stay in the village, my uncle thought it right to visit my father's grave. It was the custom for remains to be returned to China. We brought wine and offerings, and on a drizzling morning climbed a pine-decked hill. I

bowed, kow-towed, offered wine, and kneeling before the grave of my father, let him know: "Father, I have returned to our native place, to pay my respect to you."

CHAPTER NINE
Discussion Topics & Learning Activities

CONCEPT: "Different Experiences"

A. For Class Discussion

1. How might your experiences be different if you were living in China instead of the United States?

2. What might be some reasons why you would go to the native land of your ancestors to live for awhile?

B. Learning Activities

1. Find someone who had lived in another country and ask him to compare his experiences in that country and his experiences in the United States.

Monument to Chinese American War Dead, 1952

Chapter 10

Golden Harvest

As a boy fifty years ago on the farm, I learned early in life that the plump golden ears of corn in the fields did not appear just by magic. They cannot be picked right off a grocery shelf. Living in the country, I was able to watch things grow. To know that plants, like human beings, need the hard work of being cared for, of the soil being tilled, of water to reach their roots, of praying for a little luck to avoid natural disasters like frost killing the crops. We who can count on the golden harvest of life in our later years are fortunate indeed.

I count the half a decade I spent in China as part of my golden harvest. It was great good fortune that the Air Force sent me to the land of my ancestors for my military duty.

In 1948 UNRRA's challenging mission was completed. I bade farewell to Shanghai and my five years of living and learning in the Middle Kingdom were filled under "Memories" when I boarded the APL liner "General Gordon". After a stopover in Manila, this twenty-two days trip across the Pacific was a return to peace and a remaining lifetime of adjusting to life once again as a Chinese-American and being a part of San Francisco Chinatown.

Quickly I got back into newspaper work, met a lovely girl named Mollie and got married. Through my editorial duties I was drawn automatically into

the San Francisco Chinatown civic activities once more. Having been in China for five years, where gradually I picked up some Mandarin dialect, I was all the more keenly aware of my former problems in the Chinese language. The government had an educational program for veterans, so I took special courses in Chinese, and even learned how to make a polite formal speech in Chinese before my elders!

These days one does not hear much about veterans' organizations such as the American Legion. Chinatown had one of the largest and most active "posts" (or local groups) in San Francisco, called Cathay Post. Discrimination and prejudice was the lot of the minorities, including Chinese and some public-spirited veterans of World War I, like Spencer Owyang, the late Leland Kimlau and others realized that to fight it, trying to join a national organization like the American Legion was one step forward. Their reasoning was correct. Even for many years after World War II the influence of the American Legion was great in Congress. Against great odds, one of the major accomplishments of Cathay Post which is unknown to most people is the fact that this Chinese-American organization led the national convention of the Legion to support the changing of immigration laws for families of Chinese-Americans, and especially veterans.

This is the background of one of the two projects built on the sites of the two city parks in Chinatown -- St. Mary's Square and Portsmouth Square. These two projects are tributes to what community spirit and cooperation can do, and the sometimes untold part that editorial suggestions can accomplish. I'm happy to have played a part in it.

The guns of World War II had barely become silent when the Korean fighting began. Once more America sent arms and men to stop the forces of aggression. Chinese-Americans went too. Many of my friends went to fight and died. White Americans died. The enemy was North Koreans and Chinese troops. As the blood bath continued the public many times did not pick the difference between the enemy Chinese and Chinese-Americans. We were blamed for the killing and maiming of white Americans. More so than elsewhere, we at Cathay Post were heart-sore.

One day I talked with Colonel John C. Young, a combat veteran who then was commander of Cathay Post. I outlined an idea, which I would tell the Chinese reading public through editorials, about the Chinese community erecting a monument to salute the Chinese-American veterans of World War I and II who, like other Americans of all races and creeds, gave of their lives and blood to preserve America. Col. Young endorsed the idea, and within one week we raised the necessary ten thousand dollars to finance the monument. The design was created as a gift from Worley Wong, a leading prize-winning architect.

Today it stands in St. Mary's Square, its bronze plaque proudly etched with the names of those Chinese-Americans who did not die in vain. It stands directly across the statue of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, the father of the Chinese republic.

This monument, with its resulting flood of favorable public response and recognition of the Chinese-American sacrifices, stilled the emotional anger against us.

Another park project was inspired not by the dead, but by a lively little lad of age three at the time. It was my oldest son Russell. We frequently took him to the Chinese Playground, already overcrowded in 1953. At the time Portsmouth Square did not have the garage underneath. It was unkept. It did have its share of old people sitting in the sun, but lots of space was wasted. I thought that if properly planned, some of the space could be used as a playground to make it serve both young and old. Again I wrote an editorial about the plan, and enlisted the aid of Mrs. Mary Y. Mumford, director of the Chinese YWCA at the time who organized a citizens' committee to work out the idea with the park and recreation department.

When I walk past it on Washington Street on the way to my office, I realize my reward in seeing the happy faces of the children on the swings and sand lots.

For the past twenty five years in Chinatown, I feel no different than first going to Watsonville High School. It was and still is a learning process, with something new all the time. Since I was a part of the Chinatown community, first it was learning the structure of what makes the machinery of Chinatown work. I decided that the best way was not to just look at it and continue the puzzlement. I became a small part of the machinery by joining it, as well as participating in some strictly American groups outside of Chinatown to try to achieve a balance of being truly Chinese-American. I joined, and learned something about the traditional Chinese groups such as my own Leong Family Association, and the Kong Chow district association, from which my

village in China is located, and which is a part of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, better known as the Chinese Six Companies.

I learned enough about it to the point where I was asked to write about them in American magazines. Chinatown became a book whose pages I knew almost by heart. Strangely my earlier movie experience even came back to help me, for frequently I am asked to be a consultant on motion picture and television productions with Chinese backgrounds. A bilingual, bicultural extension of self has helped me in every way.

I certainly am not a rich man. Newspapermen seldom are. My wife works part time. But I believe I am rich in being Chinese-American. In spite of problems and prejudices -- which fortunately are beginning to fade somewhat -- the average Chinese-American has the opportunities of an average citizen of this country, more so in comparison with an average citizen of many other countries. I think of my cousin in the village in China. I think I am better off.

I thought about the positive side of the American way of life for the average Chinese-American. I put it down in writing in the form of essays and editorials. Speaking purely for myself, but at the same time hoping it may show some of the similar thoughts of other Chinese-Americans, I submitted them to the national Freedoms Foundation for publication. They accepted by thoughts.

Besides a money award for each, I have two handsome bronze medals accepting a Chinese-American viewpoint.

What is it to live a life-time as a Chinese-American? Naturally one sees the constant changes. Chinatown is still crowded and more so because of the new wave of immigration from Taiwan, Hong Kong. Changes, such as the leveling of many slums into public housing like Ping Yuen, made by the community action of those who now might be looked upon as older, conservative leaders. I remember a spirited young "activist" who is today's San Francisco post-master, the Honorable Lim P. Lee, and others.

This constant change is part of Chinatown, of even my own life, of course. I see in the motivated faces of the new immigrants in Chinatown the leaders of tomorrow, even though today they have landed here in what the Chinese call the Golden Hills without money, but not short on hope, as my parents did.

My older son Russell is now in Taiwan studying Chinese language. Ten years ago I co-authored a Chinese cook book which is still selling and being read. These two facts complete a full cultural heritage circle, I think, for a Chinese-American pattern. Actually my younger son Eric also is learning a lot of the Chinese language and has traveled to Taiwan and Hong Kong learning first hand about Chinese life. My cook book has given an extension of certain Chinese values stemming from food to thousands of white Americans who use the book.

I shall continue either to live in Chinatown, or not be too far away from it. I am comfortable being steeped in its old cultures, optimistic for the young in its new challenges.

What has been written are the actual real life experiences of the author himself. This is the story one father is sharing with you young Chinese-Americans and other Americans, as well as with his own two sons.

His two sons now know that they were born with the traditions of the Dragon and inspired with the spirit of the Eagle.

CHAPTER TEN
Discussion Topics & Learning Activities

CONCEPT: "Being a Chinese American in China"

A. For Class Discussion

1. What might be some reasons why a Chinese American would go to China?

2. What might be some reasons why someone living in Chinatown would move out of the community?

B. Learning Activities

1. Find someone who had moved to San Francisco from another place and ask him for some of the reasons why he had made the move.

2. Find a Chinese American who had moved to the Chinatown community from another place. Find out some of the reasons why he had made the move.

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